

Ixion Holdings (Contracts) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

21–24 November 2017

Overall effectiveness			Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding	Apprenticeships	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding		
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Senior leaders and managers have successfully improved the vast majority of weaknesses identified at the last inspection; as a result, learners' experiences are excellent and the provision is now outstanding.
- Senior leaders operate with great integrity; the organisation demonstrates substantial corporate and social responsibility through its work.
- Leaders and managers have very high expectations of their staff and monitor closely the quality of the provision.
- Leaders and managers have developed excellent and fruitful partnerships with a wide range of organisations to establish highly innovative learning programmes.
- A high proportion of apprentices and learners progress into sustained employment, self-employment or further study at a higher level.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding. Staff have exceptionally high expectations, and teaching is highly effective. The vast majority of adult learners and trainees make excellent progress as a result of high-quality teaching and learning. They develop their skills and understanding effectively.
- The vast majority of apprentices quickly develop excellent practical skills which they apply adeptly in the workplace; for some apprentices, their understanding of theoretical concepts is less well developed.
- The promotion of British values is seamlessly integrated into all aspects of apprentices' and learners' programmes; as a result, they develop a highly effective understanding of working and living in a modern British society.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Ixion Holdings (Contracts) Ltd is a not-for-profit national independent learning provider. The main office is based in Chelmsford, with several offices ranging from the North East, the Midlands, London and the South East. Ixion (Holdings) Contracts Ltd provides adult learning programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships in various locations to meet the needs of their learners and their partner organisations.
- Ixion Holdings (Contracts) Ltd provides apprenticeships programmes at intermediate, advanced and higher levels. Ixion also recruits long-term unemployed adults, care leavers and learners who claim advanced learning loans throughout the year. These learners are on short courses to gain qualifications at level 2 and 3 and progress into employment or further study at a higher level, including apprenticeships or self-employment.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the high quality of provision is maintained in the face of an evolving curriculum and growth in the provision.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment of apprentices, by:
 - ensuring that assessors and trainers plan and use teaching and learning methods to deepen apprentices' understanding of theoretical concepts, that are beyond the requirements of the qualification, to enable them to reach their full potential
 - making certain that all apprentices receive their protected time to carry out their off-the-job training sufficiently.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders and board members have a very clear strategic vision for Ixion. This enables the organisation to play a significant role in identifying and addressing local, regional and national priorities for training. Leaders and managers help drive improvements to the local economy and skills deficits in the communities served by the organisation, and significantly improve the life chances of their learners. Leaders have successfully achieved the corporate vision of 'transforming people's lives through skills, employment, enterprise and innovation, for growth'.
- Leaders and managers ensure that the organisation demonstrates a significant level of corporate and social responsibility through its work. For example, staff work with groups, including the long-term unemployed and ex-offenders, to help improve their life chances and provide them with the skills they require to secure employment. Leaders have successfully taken on learners from failing training providers and enabled the significant majority of these learners to complete their programmes successfully, and progress to the next stage of their careers.
- Leaders and managers have developed very productive partnerships with employers and a wide network of organisations; for example, funding agencies, housing associations, local enterprise partnerships and chambers of commerce. Ixion staff have worked with this network to establish highly innovative learning programmes. For example, managers have introduced short courses in construction to provide unskilled learners with the confidence and skills they need to help renovate properties for housing projects across London. On completion, a high proportion of these learners successfully progress to employment, or on to apprenticeships. Leaders are also working innovatively in partnership with a local health trust, funding agencies and a higher education provider to identify strategies to address a shortage of qualified nurses in local hospitals.
- Quality assurance processes and practice are effective. Leaders and managers have successfully raised standards and addressed most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection in 2015. The overall effectiveness of the organisation is now outstanding. Most learners achieve their qualifications, make excellent progress and significantly improve their career aspirations and opportunities.
- Managers make particularly effective use of detailed, timely and accurate data to help track and monitor learners' progress against well-defined business targets. They have excellent procedures in place to maintain the standard of subcontractors' work.
- Teaching staff are well qualified and highly skilled in their respective specialist areas. They use their expertise well to develop learners' knowledge and practical skills to a high level. Managers have sound performance management procedures in place. Staff are clear of their targets and managers' expectations; they engage regularly in constructive professional dialogue with their line managers.
- Leaders actively promote and invest in the continuous professional development of staff; they provide them with a broad range of high-quality training. Staff also maintain their practical skills by regular short periods working in industry in their respective vocational areas. Managers use the outcomes from observations of teaching and learning well to help identify staff development priorities. This range of initiatives has helped improve the

quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which is now outstanding. Managers have also developed a strong culture of investing in, and developing, their own staff to take on positions that are more senior.

- Leaders ensure that learners receive very good guidance and support from staff to enable them to choose an appropriate course to develop their vocational knowledge and skills. They also receive valuable guidance to help them progress to further study or into employment on completion of their programme.

The governance of the provider

- Leaders and the board ensure that there are clear and effective governance arrangements in place. Board members have successfully helped managers raise standards. They positively influence and set Ixion's strategic priorities and oversee the financial security of the organisation.
- Ixion board members have a suitable breadth of skills to support and challenge leaders effectively in all aspects of the organisation's work. The board receives comprehensive and timely reports from leaders and managers to help track and monitor the progress of the organisation. Minutes of meetings accurately reflect the high level of appropriate support and challenge from board members.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have suitable recruitment and pre-employment checks in place when appointing new staff. Staff ensure any safeguarding concerns are followed up to full resolution.
- Staff promote safe working practices very well. As a result, all learners maintain a very good approach to health and safety in the workplace. Learners feel safe, are safe, and are knowledgeable about how to stay safe online. Learners are confident about what action to take and who to contact in the event of any safeguarding concerns.
- Staff ensure that all learners understand the 'Prevent' duty and are aware of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation. All staff, learners and governors undertake suitable training on safeguarding.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Learners are highly motivated and most become very successful; they meet the exceptionally high expectations that staff have of them. Staff make very good use of their knowledge and experience to plan and deploy highly effective methods to inspire learners. Most learners gain very good knowledge during their studies and develop high levels of new skills in the workplace. For example, apprentices following health and social care carefully select units with their assessor and employer to design their learning to enable them to specialise in particular care roles and, furthermore, undertake relevant additional courses to enhance their understanding of complex health conditions such as diabetes and dementia and/or team leading and management training.

- Trainers and assessors establish learners' starting points and their pastoral support needs very well at the beginning of their programmes. They assess individual learners' skills and knowledge carefully, including their initial skills in English and mathematics. Trainers and assessors make use of exceptionally stimulating teaching and learning methods and use well-considered resources to inspire learners. As a result, the great majority of learners respond well and make outstanding progress. For example, learners with an ambition to become self-employed painters and decorators embark on a traineeship programme and develop highly relevant skills in starting a business. The vast majority progress onto an apprenticeship and develop high-quality vocational skills.
- Learners develop a greater awareness of their potential and view themselves as high-performing members of the workforce. Adult learners following computer technology courses gain very useful qualifications, which are industry-relevant requirements to enhance their career options and employment prospects. The vast majority of employers value highly apprentices' exceptional professionalism in the work they undertake. For example, employers of advanced level management apprentices comment upon the notable improvements in apprentices' communications to all staff at differing levels, which has led to increased productivity in meeting deadlines.
- Learners receive well-considered and effective feedback from their employers, trainers and assessors. As a result, they have a very good understanding of the progress they are making and how to improve the standards of their work. However, a few assessors do not provide apprentices with sufficiently challenging feedback to enable them to develop a deeper understanding of theory and reach their full potential.
- Trainers and assessors mostly set demanding targets with challenging timescales that take full account of learners' ambitions and career goals. For example, team-leading apprentices who are interested in becoming managers have targets to explore promotion opportunities with their existing employer.
- Learners on all courses demonstrate an excellent awareness of health and safety practice and how to work safely in their work and learning environments. For example, plant operators working in an open cast coalmine understand fully the importance of listening very carefully to radio communications to ensure they stay away from blasting operations. Learners have a good awareness of internet safety and the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Learners have a sound awareness of the importance of equality and diversity. Staff regularly take part in meaningful discussions with their learners; they ensure effectively that learners understand the importance of meeting the needs of different cultures in their work and demonstrating high levels of respect to all.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- The vast majority of apprentices and learners develop greatly in confidence. They become proficient and self-assured in the new skills and knowledge they acquire during their studies. Apprentices take pride in their work and develop good and current work-related skills that their employers value highly. For example, learners following advanced apprenticeships in construction know what they need to consider, such as falls and collapses of buildings, the use of mobile plant operatives and the quality of visibility when on a complex site environment on large building projects. Adult learners and trainees

develop extremely effective skills and knowledge to enhance their chances of gaining relevant employment, starting their own businesses or progressing onto meaningful further study.

- Learners frequently attend their workplace and their lessons and are punctual. Learners demonstrate strong professional behaviours. They work very well in collaboration with their peers and in teams; they become self-assured through meaningful debates. Learners usefully self-assess their work in order to reflect on their current skills and how they can improve them further.
- A very high proportion of learners are highly motivated and ready for work and learning. They make excellent gains in their personal and social skills through the high-quality support they receive from staff. Most apprentices and adult learners undertake relevant additional qualifications to enhance their work-related skills.
- The standards of apprentices' and learners' practical work is of high quality. For example, advanced and intermediate level construction apprentices benefit from their employers modelling best practice for them to follow and this results in apprentices' work being of industry standard. Most learners and apprentices produce good standards of theoretical work; for example, health and social care apprentices use key technical terms very well in their written work and demonstrate good subject knowledge of complex theories. However, a few apprentices do not reach their full potential in acquiring knowledge of theoretical concepts beyond the boundaries of the qualification.
- Most learners on traineeships benefit from tailored teaching and learning methods to meet their needs, alongside highly relevant work placements to ensure they accelerate their work-related skills. As a result, they quickly gain employment or progress onto an apprenticeship programme on completion of their course.
- Trainers and assessors use well-considered links to mathematics in their activities to enhance learners' work-related skills. As a result, learners make extremely good progress in improving their mathematics skills. For example, adult learners enrolled on information and communication technology (ICT) courses calculate the costs of bespoke computer systems for a variety of different customers. A trainee learner on a painting and decorating course proficiently calculated area and perimeter to prepare estimates for potential customers.
- Trainers and assessors provide support in abundance to enable learners to improve their English skills; for example, by making use of well-planned activities such as learners identifying spelling and grammar errors in job advertisements and writing high-quality letters to potential employers. Trainers and assessors ensure that learners pay good attention to detail and correct any errors in their written work. Learners develop excellent communication skills through discussions, meetings and training events.
- Learners and apprentices benefit from very effective information, advice and guidance. They are suitably placed onto the right courses, well matched to their careers aspirations. Almost all learners benefit from guidance on employment options and/or further study at a higher level.
- Learners regularly explore good work ethics and healthy lifestyles with their trainers and assessors. For example, learners and apprentices develop a sound understanding of the effects of drug and alcohol misuse. They explore ways in which they can work more effectively at work. For example, by developing good eating and sleeping habits to ensure

that they are more effective at work and by decreasing stress through regular exercise.

- Staff teach learners very well to understand British values. For example, learners in a particular region attributed far right radicalisation to the increase in unemployment rates. Leaders have ensured that employers have a good understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and the importance of promoting British values in the work place. Assessors plan and deploy effective learning activities to develop apprentices' understanding and, as a result, most apprentices fully understand the importance of demonstrating British values in the work place, with their peers, clients and customers.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- The vast majority of learners, trainees and apprentices make outstanding progress in relation to their starting points. Most learners excel in their subjects because staff make highly effective use of the information they gather on learners' abilities and aspirations in order to plan and deliver programmes. The vast majority of adults make excellent progress compared to their starting points.
- A very high proportion of learners achieve their qualifications. Leaders' and managers' actions have led to significant improvements. They ensure that apprentices transferred from providers who have ceased providing training make momentous progress to enable them to catch up on their work. However, very few apprentices still do not achieve in the time allocated.
- Learners who declare having a learning difficulty and/or disability receive outstanding support, which enables them to achieve their qualifications at a higher rate to those who do not. Leaders and managers ensure that all groups of learners achieve equally well. They have improved the gaps between the achievement of male and female learners, although a very few remain in a few subjects.
- Learners acquire high-quality skills and in-depth knowledge during their studies; most progress to sustained meaningful employment, higher levels of study or become self-employed.
- Staff establish very quickly learners' aspirations when they embark on their qualifications. As a result, most learners and apprentices gain additional qualifications and develop a broad range of skills to enhance their chances in gaining pertinent skills to enable them to boost their job chances.
- Learners also improve their broader skills, in particular their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. The great majority of learners who take English and mathematics successfully achieve these qualifications.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Outstanding

- A total of 484 adult learners currently attend courses. Around a third study short intensive courses at levels 1 and 2 for unemployed adults, aiming to progress into employment or self-employment. A sixth of adults follow distance learning programmes for the unemployed to gain qualifications to support progression into employment or further and

higher education. A small number of adults follow pre-employability courses. Ixion recruits a large number of adults throughout the year on short courses; around one thousand five hundred adults studied courses in 2016/17.

- Leaders and managers have been highly effective in reviewing the curriculum and improving performance. They have continued to develop strong partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and employers to ensure that programmes match closely their needs and those of the learners. They provide carefully tailored progression routes and highly individualised and purposeful traineeships.
- Learners make very good progress as a result of the excellent quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Adult learners gain swiftly a wide range of practical skills and deepen their knowledge of relevant industry. For example, learners taking preparation for work qualifications gain valuable trade skills. Learners following enterprise courses produce viable business ideas which help them to enter the world of business; for example, a learner has successfully opened a bookshop and another has set up a regular stall in a large shopping centre. Learners who claim advanced learning loans quickly improve skills and knowledge in information technology, business administration, education and training.
- Trainers are very knowledgeable, skilled and motivational. They help learners to improve their confidence and self-esteem. Trainers provide well-designed and stimulating activities that challenge all learners equally well and promote team working very effectively. Learners make extensive use of ICT, including well-presented audio and visual learning aids, to enhance learning, record progress and support independent learning.
- Trainers provide highly effective feedback and support. They make excellent use of the information they gather on learners' existing skills and knowledge to ensure additional support is available where appropriate.
- The very great majority of learners make substantial and sustained progress in developing their English and mathematics skills. Learners enjoy calculations on construction programmes and financial forecasting on enterprise courses. Trainers skilfully encourage learners to extend their writing and literacy skills and to enhance their verbal communication. All learners achieve their functional skills qualifications.
- Learners access a good range of additional qualifications such as networking and application in information technology. Those studying enterprise courses benefit from free additional courses; for example, to enhance their networking and budgeting skills. As a result, most learners achieve positive outcomes and destinations.

Apprenticeships

Good

- Most apprentices are adults, with a very small proportion aged 16 to 18 mostly following administration apprenticeship programmes. Around two fifths of adult apprentices study health and social care and business management programmes, with three tenths following engineering and manufacturing technologies. The remainder are enrolled on building construction, administration and ICT.
- Leaders and managers ensure that apprenticeship programmes are well planned to meet the needs of local employers and local and regional skills priorities. They make sure that they meet the principles and requirements of apprenticeships. However, in a minority of

instances assessors do not check routinely that apprentices receive sufficient off-the-job training. As a result, a few apprentices complete work in their own time.

- Leaders, managers and assessors work closely with employers to provide good-quality training. Assessors inform employers regularly of the progress apprentices make towards achieving their programmes. They support employers to gain a good understanding of apprentices' work-related skills and what they need to develop these further.
- Most assessors consistently monitor learners' progress. Most assessors effectively ensure that they intervene to support apprentices who fall behind. As a result, most current learners are making good progress. However, a few assessors do not set targets which support best progress as they often focus on tasks for apprentices to complete rather than the relevant learning and skills to be developed.
- Apprentices receive effective individual learning and support based on their starting points. However, a small minority of assessors do not sufficiently challenge learners to excel in their understanding of theoretical concepts and reach their full potential. In these instances, assessors are too quick to give information rather than challenge learners to think for themselves.
- Assessors have high levels of industry-related knowledge and skills that they use well to motivate apprentices and enable them to excel in their job roles. For example, assessors regularly enquire about potential enhanced roles and promotions at work and advise apprentices how to apply for them successfully. They give good information, advice and guidance to support apprentices to move onto the next stage of their learning or work. As a result, the majority move into sustained employment, a higher level of apprenticeship or gain promotion.
- Most apprentices achieve their functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT and most pass their tests at their first attempt. They develop their skills well through work-related activities. For example, construction apprentices calculate confidently and independently U-values of a standard cavity wall for heat loss to enhance their skills in mathematics, and thus adding value to their employers' business and productivity.

Provider details

Unique reference number	58521
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,516
Principal/CEO	Mr John Govett, CEO
Telephone number	07712 862404
Website	www.ixionholdings.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	75	-	265	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	36	495	44	460	7	101		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	5		13		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Personal Track Safety Vista Training Solutions Chelsea Football Club							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief operating officer, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Harpreet Nagra, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector
Rebecca Perry	Ofsted Inspector
Dan Grant	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Masterson	Ofsted Inspector

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